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Oslo Group on Energy Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics. The report describes the activities of the Oslo Group in 2006, the main findings of the first meeting, the establishment and working mechanism of its electronic discussion forum, the survey it designed on official energy statistics and the issues related to coordination with other groups. The report also contains information about items for the draft agenda of the second meeting of the Group.

* E/CN.3/2007/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 4* (E/2006/24), chap. I.B.

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Report of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics

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I. Background

1. The Oslo Group on Energy Statistics was established by the bureau of the Statistical Commission in 2005, after discussions at the Statistical Commission based on the issues discussed in the report of the programme reviewer (Statistics Norway) on energy statistics (E/CN.3/2005/3). The mandate of the Oslo Group is contained in annex I.

II. Activities of the Group in 2006

A. First meeting of the Oslo Group

2. The first meeting of the Oslo Group was held in Oslo in February 2006. The main focus for the first meeting was to establish a forum for countries to discuss methodological issues, to identify user needs, to learn from good practices and to contribute to methodological developments related to energy statistics through harmonization, as a means of improving the energy statistics produced on an international level. The need to strengthen official energy statistics was emphasized at the meeting.

3. The challenges facing the production of high-quality energy statistics were discussed at the meeting. For instance, the importance was underlined of good communication between users and producers of energy statistics, to ensure high quality and relevance. It was also pointed out that market liberalization and confidentiality problems are a major challenge for many countries; the issue of improved methods could be a topic for further discussion for the Oslo Group.

4. Many of the presentations stressed the importance of the harmonization of standards and definitions and of statistics themselves. It was emphasized that a global market needs global standards. Particular emphasis was given to harmonizing the definitions of fossil fuel reserves and to harmonizing and closing the link between energy accounts and national accounts. Also, it was recommended that renewable energy definitions be harmonized and that methods related to new energy sources be further developed and integrated in energy statistics. The Oslo Group must pay particular attention to fuel classifications and definitions, conversion factors and different methods for treating non-energy use and blast furnaces.

5. The Group noted that there is a need for updated and modern energy statistics manuals. It was highlighted that the format of the 1982 manual has to be improved if statisticians are to use it. Some of the problems are a result of unclear or unavailable definitions and standards for compiling the energy balance and uncertainty about data collection methods. Standards, conversion factors and best scientific methods should be more easily available to countries. It is also difficult for international organizations to convert national differences in energy statistics to international comparable energy balances, and they would benefit from more standardized national energy statistics.

B. Electronic discussion forum

6. To secure communication between the meetings of the Oslo Group, a discussion forum has been set up on the Group's website at Statistics Norway (available at http://www.ssb.no/ocg). The forum is divided into six different areas or discussion groups. The first area is established as a channel for the secretariat to spread general information about the work of the Group to its members and is not meant for discussion. The other five areas are established as groups whose aim is to enable free discussion between the members of the Group on the following topics:

(a) Crude oil, natural gas and natural gas liquids;

(b) Coal and coke;

(c) Biomass and waste;

(d) New and alternative energy sources and technology;

(e) Principles and methods in energy balances.

7. The forum was launched in August 2006 with contributions from the secretariat. The forum is open for all to read, but only registered members of the Oslo Group can make written contributions. As at 30 November there was some activity in the groups concerned with coal and coke, new and alternative energy sources and technology, and principles and methods in energy balances. Statistics Norway is working to make the forum more easily accessible and will give a practical presentation of the forum at the meeting to be held in India in February 2007.

C. Questionnaire on official energy statistics

8. Under the mandate of the Oslo Group, one of its aims is to define the scope of official energy statistics. To fulfil that part of the mandate, it is necessary to get an overview of the status of energy statistics around the world as regards United Nations principles for official statistics. To obtain the necessary information, the United Nations Statistics Division and Statistics Norway, as the secretariat of the Oslo Group, agreed to send a questionnaire to the States Members of the United Nations. Statistics Norway drafted a questionnaire that has been submitted to the Division. The Division will be in charge of distribution and collection of the questionnaire.

9. The analysis will be performed by the secretariat of the Oslo Group, and its findings will be presented to the Group for discussion at its meetings and on the discussion forum. The results will be important for the fulfilment of the Oslo Group's mandate.

III. Coordination with other groups

10. There are many groups working on issues related to energy statistics, such as the Inter-secretariat Working Group, the London Group, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)/Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)/Eurostat working group on sustainable development and the group working

on the revision of the System of Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) manual. It is important to have good coordination between all these groups and for good coordination the mandates of the groups must be clear.

11. The Oslo Group has been presented to several of these groups at their meetings, including at the meeting of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (CEEEA) and the London Group in New York, in June 2006, and at the meeting of the ECE/OECD/Eurostat working group on sustainable development held in Oslo in November 2006.

12. At the CEEEA meeting, the Oslo Group also presented a document entitled "Coordination of official statistics". The document, which is available through the Oslo Group's discussion forum, explains how the coordination of energy statistics fits into the strategies and working methods of National Statistical Offices. It is important that energy data are collected only once and used for different purposes, including the production of primary energy, national accounts, energy accounts, emission statistics and accounts. A system for official energy statistics must be designed with a broad scope to build a complete system of statistics on both energy production and use. That means that a system should be identified for supply and use, in both energy terms (natural unit of measurement and energy content) and value terms, providing all the data to meet the needs of important users. It is not possible to have tailor-made statistics for all purposes. The challenge is to combine users' needs and to optimize a multi-purpose system of energy statistics.

13. The Oslo Group was invited to contribute to the revision of the SEEA manual in a letter from CEEEA dated 5 September 2006, especially as regards the element of energy accounts. That invitation will be discussed at the meeting of the Oslo Group in New Delhi. However, the secretariat of the Group believes that it will be able to provide documentation that can be part of a revised SEEA manual.

IV. Second meeting of the Oslo Group

14. The second meeting of the Oslo Group will be held in New Delhi from 5 to 7 February 2007, and it will be hosted by the Indian Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The second meeting of the Oslo Group will focus on the operational aspects of cooperation. Items for discussion include: what needs to be done to present a revised manual by 2010; how the new manual will be formed; what elements are missing in the existing manual and how they can be included; what elements in the manual need revision; and how and to what extent the elements of official statistics can be incorporated in the new manual, particularly best practices. There will also be a focus on how to develop links and bridges between energy balances and energy accounts and other statistical systems, such as national accounts and emissions statistics.

Annex I

Mandate of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics

The objective of the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics is to address issues related to energy statistics and to contribute to improved international standards and improved methods for official energy statistics by pooling expertise in the energy community. The Group will undertake the following actions: (a) identify users' needs; (b) define the scope of official energy statistics; (c) identify and collect national and international best practices; (d) review and contribute to the updating of United Nations Statistics Division handbooks and manuals on energy statistics; (e) identify gaps in coverage (e.g. fuel types, flows) and develop a methodology to cover gaps; (f) adopt links or develop bridges to international standard concepts and classifications in environmental and economic statistics to facilitate the integration and interface of energy statistics with other statistical systems; and (g) recommend a core set of tables as a minimum requirement at the national and international levels to satisfy major user needs.

Annex II

Members of the Oslo Group

At the first meeting of the Oslo Group, held in Oslo in February 2006, 19 countries and five international organizations attended and expressed their interest in participating in the work of the Group.

Countries

Austria, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

Organizations

International Atomic Energy Agency, International Energy Agency, Eurostat, International Monetary Fund (statistical departments) and the United Nations Statistics Division.

After the meeting, other countries showed interest in participating in the work of the Oslo Group. After the meeting in India it is anticipated that a clearer picture will form of who are members and contributors to the work of the Oslo Group and to the revision of the United Nations manuals on energy statistics.

Points of contact

Chair of the Oslo Group

Mr. Olav Ljones
Deputy Director General
Statistics Norway
P.O. Box 8131 Dep
N-0033 Oslo
Norway

Leader of the secretariat

Mr. Atle Tostensen
Adviser
Statistics Norway
P.O. Box 8131 Dep
N-0033 Oslo
Norway